

The Best of

THE INSIDER

By Mickey Switlaski

Bachelor Party's Lost Weekend

Secrets of the Ya Ya Brotherhood

My little brother Matt, aka The Honorable Circuit Court Judge Matthew Steven Switalski, recently married at the tender age of 34. I thought he'd never leave my mother's house. He had it pretty good there as the baby of 7 kids. But the combination of rent and the love of the beautiful Rebecca Agostino proved irresistible for Matt. Matt honored me by asking me to be his best man at his May wedding. Part of my traditional duties included the staging of a *Stag Nite*.

But Matt is unique. Instead of the traditional rite of passage involving an evening of *heavy drinking, gambling, and womanizing*, Matt envisioned something different.

His initial plan of jetting to Britain to see a couple of soccer games proved unfeasible. The fallback involved Matt and I driving to Washington DC for a long weekend to see Congress, the Supreme Court, the Monuments, Arlington, and Gettysburg. Matt is a man of ideas, and our pilgrimage to these shrines promised to fire his imagination more than the DVD version of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*.

The trip got off to a rocky start when the 8-hour, 500 mile drive turned into a 14-hour, 800-mile wander through the wilderness. We don't like to talk about it, because what went on during those lost hours should properly remain a mystery. Let's just say you normally go from Michigan to Ohio to Pennsylvania to Maryland. We will stipulate that documentary evidence exists showing our vehicle traversed State of New York toll roads. We offer no comment on the infamous 14-hour gap.

We take our inspiration from Henry Ford II. In the words of Hank the Deuce, "*Never complain, never explain.*"

We can talk about DC. Congress was out of session, so we could not enter the actual House and Senate chambers. But the Cherry Blossoms around the tidal basin were in full bloom, truly a sight to behold. We got into the Supreme Court Chambers, but missed the historic Affirmative Action case by two days. We went to Camden Yards to see the Orioles get pounded 12-2 while we pounded down Boogus Burgers with my sister Moe and her husband Rick and their kids Molly and Andrew.

Carolyn Hadgikosti, who is not only the granddaughter of *Lindell AC* owner Johnny Butsicaris, but also my next door neighbor, and beyond that a valued member of Congressman Sandy Levin's Washington staff, escorted us on a great tour of the Capitol and the Court.

When she offered to take us out for a tour of the monuments that evening, we jumped at it. We arranged to meet for dinner and the monuments at the *Old Ebbits Grill*, where General Ulysses S. Grant used to drink. Matt and I proceeded to Arlington. It's built on a farm confiscated from Robert E. Lee, and includes Lee's house, which sits high atop a hill with a great vista of downtown Washington. Nearby are the graves of President Kennedy and Jackie, with the eternal flame. A stone's throw away is the simple grave of Robert Kennedy, provocative in its simplicity. A small white cross and plain headstone mark his grave, and across the way his eloquent words call us to fight for justice. The cemetery closes at 5, so we caught the metro to *Old Ebbits*.

We were an hour early.

We'd been up all night, a table was available, and we were starving.

So we ate.

This was a problem. We'd promised Carolyn and her friend dinner. Now we'd gorged ourselves without them. What to do?

Pretend we hadn't eaten. We quickly paid our bill and snuck up to the front of the restaurant to meet Carolyn and Jennie. By now *Ebbits* was packed.

We met Carolyn and she got in line for a table. Matt and I his back in the crowd, so the hostess wouldn't recognize us. She told Carolyn it would be an hour before we got a table.

"Let's go do the monuments first," I insisted. "When we come back it won't be as crowded."

Carolyn and Jamie weren't too keen on the idea, plus they were dressed to the nines. But I was determined.

Matt pulled me aside.

"These poor girls have been working all day. They want to eat," he confided, weakly.

"I can't eat another dinner right now," I told him. "I've got to walk that salmon off. You give me an hour and a half of walking and I'll crush that menu."

The ladies took us on the tour, and so began the *Affair of the Two Dinners*.

We enjoyed the Jefferson, Lincoln, Korean, and Vietnam Memorials. The chiseled words of Lincoln at Gettysburg and the Second Inaugural are always inspiring. And walking thru the Vietnam Memorial is like experiencing the War all over again.

I could do without the new FDR memorial, a sprawling monstrosity of pavement and stone blocks that covers what seems like two thirds of the tidal basin. After walking thru 3 or 4 huge plazas, I thought that was it. "No," explained Carolyn. "That was just one term. We have 3 more to go!"

We returned to *Old Ebbits Grill*, and a table was ready. Matt and I worried we'd get the same waiter, but luckily we were seated in an entirely different section of the restaurant.

Our ruse was succeeding. I became giddy.

During orders, I added an appetizer to demonstrate how famished I was. I questioned the waiter about the sweet potato soup, which I had just eaten two hours earlier. "My, that sounds magnificent," I gushed. "I'll try that!"

Emboldened, I began gesticulating wildly with my spoon. "This is delightful," I announced, to no one in particular. "I must try this again, sometimes." Matt was struggling, but with a Herculean effort I managed to clean my plate. We dodged the waitstaff on our way out, and skulked past the hostess to freedom.

Carolyn and Jamie were delightful company. "We'll take you somewhere else next time we come," I told them. "The portions there are *so meager*." I began to insist that we return to the restaurant, in order that I might lodge a formal complaint with the hostess. But the hour was late, and the ladies had to work in the morning and begged me to suffer the wrong. I reluctantly acquiesced.

Matt and I proceeded to the train station. We'd missed the last train by 5 minutes.

We took a cab to the Baltimore Park and Ride, and got lost again driving home.

Our trip ended with a full day at Gettysburg, visiting the battle sites and enjoying a custom tour from a New England banker who has made study of the war his hobby. All the way back to Michigan, all 7 and a half-hours, we listened to the Teaching Company's taped lectures on the History of the Civil War. All things considered, it was a great trip.

Lincoln fought to preserve the union.

I think Matt and Rebecca's will flourish more easily.

Vindicated Again

For the 2nd time, the courts have struck down a 1999 law requiring drug testing of all welfare recipients. Although the bill had popular appeal, I voted against it, courageously, if I may say so. I explained in this newsletter why I believed it was an unconstitutional violation of the 4th Amendment's protection against general, warrantless searches (see *Insider v4, n2 March, 1999*). Every once in a while it's nice to take a stand on principle against laws that are politically tempting but which erode our constitutional rights. The law was immediately enjoined by a US District Judge, and now the US Circuit Court of Appeals has rejected the Engler administration's appeal. Governor Granholm will not appeal this decision. The Court's action maintains an important limitation on the power of the government over individual rights.

Yellowsnakes open Season

Defending champion Roseville Yellowsnakes opened their season with two wins in the U-10 Roseville Youth Soccer League. Liam Switalski, Ricky Steenland, Derek Boedeker, Ashley Just, Andrew Allor, Domenic Pica, Chayne Campbell, Samantha Childress, Joe Czech, Jesse Marshall, Ronnie Porter, Jacob Russell, Jeff and Joanna Salas, Kimmy Wilson, and David VanDuker will continue the great winning tradition of the Yellowsnakes. Skipper Mickey Switalski returns to the helm from his GM duties, replacing unbeaten Scottish international Neil McKenna.

The Senate Rules

Life in the House of Lords

I spent 4 years in the House of Representatives.

And I loved every minute of it.

Serving in the legislature is like going off to college. You leave home and meet strangers from all over. And you learn a lot if you listen to the experts and ask a bunch of questions.

You get to know your colleagues. There aren't that many of you, and with term limits, there are only Freshmen and Sophomores and Seniors. In college, students ask, "What's your major?" Legislators ask, "What committees are you on?"

I felt lucky every day I walked into the Capitol. Heroic architecture inspires you to value and respect the grandeur of our democratic institutions. You try hard to be worthy of them.

If the House was college all over again, the Senate is definitely Graduate School. I loved the House for its raucous sessions, irreverent food fights, its frequent all-nighters, and its outlandish characters. It was barely organized chaos.

The Senate is quite different.

For one thing, it's far more disciplined and professional. The Senate has 38 members compared to 110 in the House. Its members are generally more experienced. There are 11 House members in their 20s, including four 22-year olds. In contrast, almost all the Senators were representatives and also have experience in local government. Age brings a certain maturity and *gravitas* to the job.

The Senate is far more organized. When I was in the House, check in time was 2 pm for the start of session.

But we *never* started at two. Roll Call for attendance would begin at two, but then would drag on and on.

People would straggle in late, and soon people stopped coming at two, because we never started at two. So people started coming at 2:15. Before you know it, we were starting at 2:30.

In the Senate, Lieutenant Governor John Cherry, who is the presiding officer in the Senate, brings the gavel down every day at 10 am sharp. You have 1 minute to check in, and the clock is running. You also have one minute to vote. In the House, leadership used to keep the voting board open for hours, especially when the Speaker of the House was short of votes to pass a bill and needed to change a few representatives' minds. Sometimes members would *clear the board* and end a vote if it wasn't coming out the way they wanted. Not in the Senate.

No *clearing the board* once a vote starts. Votes are tallied after exactly one minute. No fast gavel in the Senate. No being ignored by the presiding officer. And if anyone wants a recorded vote, just ask and you get a record roll call vote.

These rules ensure respect for the institution, members' time, and the integrity of the process.

I like that.

No long interminable speeches, either. In the House people would drone on for what seemed like hours, and then ask to be recognized to speak again. In the Senate, you get 5 minutes. When the clock runs out, the gavel comes down and you are done. If you can't make your point in 5 minutes, you need an editor.

Plus, we actually *listen* to one another. If you ever watch the House on TV, we almost never listened to one another's speeches. In the Senate, it is actually quiet and most Senators value the debate, by listening, even if they are not speaking.

How refreshing.

I chaired the Democratic Caucus meetings, which was like herding cats. The meetings would go on for hours. After two hours of our 52 members sharing their opinions on some issue, some of them several times, we would ask members to conclude the debate. But members would insist on having their say.

"Everything that could possibly be said has already been said," I noted on more than one occasion. "*But not by everybody.*"

And so the debate would continue.

Thankfully, we are not so self-indulgent in the Senate.

Still, for all its faults, I wouldn't trade my 4 years in the House for anything.

But with all due respect, *the Senate Rules*.